

**171. Action Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs (Burt) to Secretary of State Haig<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 24, 1982

SUBJECT

UK-Argentine Confrontation: U.S. Military Options

*Issue for Decision*

Whether to phone Cap<sup>2</sup> to establish a joint State-Defense Working Group to oversee U.S. contingency planning and military assistance for a Falklands contingency.

*Essential Factors*

This memorandum briefly examines U.S. military options, including increased logistics, materiel and equipment support, US force presence and posturing, and direct participation in combat operations, on behalf of the U.K. It does so in two phases: before or during the initial phase of major hostilities and amidst hostilities that had been going on for a week or longer. It also discusses other direct uses of U.S. military force, be it vis-a-vis the Soviets or on behalf of civilians and military personnel on the Falklands or in Argentina. Many of its assessments are rough, given the lack of hard information available to us, and DOD's unwillingness to provide relevant military data and evaluations.

*This memorandum reaches several important conclusions, that:*

—just before or during the initial phase of hostilities, we do not anticipate extraordinary UK requests for materiel or services much beyond the scale already received;

—given long lead times owing to distances and the lack of assured local facilities, US options to inject naval, air or ground forces into the area, whether in direct support of the UK or otherwise, are severely circumscribed;

—decisions must be taken soon, i.e., in the next few days, if the US is to have forces on the scene 2 or 3 weeks hence, and that such

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979–1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive April 24–26 1982. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Drafted by Haass. Haig initialed at the top right-hand corner of the memorandum, indicating that he saw it. A stamped notation also indicates that he saw the memorandum. Another notation in an unknown hand in the top right-hand corner of the memorandum reads: "Secretary called Weinberger Sunday afternoon 4/25/82." The text of the memorandum was underlined extensively with a highlighter pen.

<sup>2</sup> Caspar Weinberger.

decisions could have major impact on our diplomatic role and Soviet behavior; and

—Soviet options to assist Argentina appear even more limited, although we are continuing to explore possible actions on their part.<sup>3</sup>

*Initial Phases:*

The UK should not require anything substantially more than we are already doing to accomplish most military tasks short of a direct invasion of the Falklands (i.e., blockade, suasion). However, *to the extent an invasion appeared to be imminent or had actually begun, we might expect considerable requests for assistance.* Although it is only speculative, equipment items the UK might seek could include (in addition to Stinger)<sup>4</sup> SUB-HARPOON, HARM missiles, special munitions (including runway-cratering ordnance), ECM-related gear, and replacement aircraft and parts (helicopters and Harriers). We could also expect to receive UK requests to make use of Ascension for launch and recovery of combat operations and for enhanced operational intelligence. The latter could include [*less than 1 line not declassified*] and use of long-range reconnaissance aircraft, both of which would be very difficult to provide. Other possible requests might include specialized fuel, foul weather gear, technical assistance in mine countermeasures, ECM equipment, amphibious landing craft and assault vehicles.

*One factor which would affect our decision to meet any such requests would be visibility.* The maintenance of U.S. credibility in Buenos Aires, and the U.S. potential to act as a go-between, could depend in large part on our ability to maintain a plausible public position that we were not going beyond our stated pledge not to provide the UK any extraordinary assistance. We should only be willing to compromise this posture if we determine that the U.S. diplomatic role had come to an end for the time being, or that there were more to gain overall by our providing overt assistance to the UK.

Such considerations aside, *establishing a special channel to manage such support of the UK is essential.* It would reduce the chance of leaks, assist coordination, and provide us with plausible deniability should it prove useful.

*Amidst Battle:* Three categories of UK requests for U.S. support can be envisioned once a battle for the Falklands had been underway for more than a few days:

—*increased indirect support*, i.e., equipment, logistics, spare parts, e.g., replacement helicopters, Harriers, special ammunition, air defense

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<sup>3</sup> See Document 184 and footnote 6 thereto.

<sup>4</sup> See Document 111 and footnote 2 thereto.

equipment, sonobuoys, ECM Pods, special fuels, ground sensors, and communications support.

—*direct U.S. involvement in a support mode*, i.e., flying tankers, cargo planes and reconnaissance aircraft, salvage and repair assistance, communications relay, combat engineers and seabees, harbor clearance, and MCM capability.

—*direct U.S. involvement in a participatory mode*, i.e., fly ASW missions, provide tacair and/or naval gunfire support. (The considerable constraints on direct US participation are discussed below.)

As combat continued, the UK, for military and political reasons alike, could find itself facing mounting difficulties and needing an acceptable resolution; i.e., either clearcut victory, or some balance which could be the prelude to an acceptable diplomatic solution. Possibilities for U.S. involvement at this juncture would be two:

—large-scale combat/direct participation to introduce a decisive factor into the battle, e.g., carrier task group or tactical bombing; or

—a U.S. intervention to provide E&E for the inhabitants of the island, or to police some withdrawal of either Argentine or UK forces, perhaps to be replaced by U.S. forces in what could evolve into a peacekeeping operation.

*Two other forms of U.S. military involvement in a Falklands crisis may be more likely.* Although large-scale E&E of U.S. citizens and personnel in Argentina would not be a realistic proposition, the U.S. could signal the GOA (whether in a deterrent or responsive fashion) not to threaten or allow attacks on U.S. citizens in country.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the U.S. could deploy naval forces to the area to counter any actual or threatened Soviet moves. To preserve this option, however, critical decisions are needed soon on our part.

*The Soviets have a number of “indirect” options available:* intelligence support, provision of easily absorbed stores and supplies, advisors, MANPADS, and even a Soviet-manned air defense network. Airlift could only provide limited quantities, and sea lift would require some three weeks to arrive once underway. More directly, the Soviets could introduce their own combat forces. However, no naval combatant could be on the scene for some 2–3 weeks (and even then the Soviet presence would be minimal), and Soviet submarine options are either severely limited or non-existent over the course of the next few weeks. (We are

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<sup>5</sup> [text not declassified] Earlier, on April 13, the Department created a Contingency Planning Group for Argentina, in order to review emergency action plans of the Embassy in Buenos Aires and the Department as a whole. On April 23, Kennedy sent a briefing memorandum to Haig, outlining steps taken by the Embassy to develop evacuation plans. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P850089–0752)

examining the possibility as to whether Soviet long range aviation based on Angola could provide more than reconnaissance support to the Argentines). Thus, *absent prolonged confrontation and a rapid Soviet decision to dispatch combatants or supplies, Soviet involvement is likely to be limited to political and token logistic/materiel support.*

*Any consideration of possible U.S. introduction of force must include the operational realities.* At the moment, there are two CVBGs in the Caribbean which, at best, could arrive in the vicinity of the Falklands in 2 or 3 weeks. Winter weather and rough seas could affect dramatically the speed of advance and the level of operational capability. This introduction of US forces into the immediate area would pose a dilemma, however. Although carrier task forces offer our best if not only means of providing a sustained, capable military presence in the region, their dispatch would provide both Argentina and the Soviets with considerable warning. Deployment of land based air lift and tacair would require overt political and logistic support from a number of Hemispheric states particularly Chile. Again, though, we would have to begin preparing now to give us this option down the road.

Yet absent any US decision to dispatch forces soon—indeed, possibly even with one—a *confrontation would probably evolve long past its critical phase before U.S. military forces arrived on scene. In any case, decisions are needed within several days if we are to possess viable military options in several weeks time.*

Any U.S. military involvement which included sending U.S. Armed Forces into imminent or actual hostilities, or the sending of U.S. Armed Forces equipped for combat into the area, would be likely to trigger the *War Powers Resolution*,<sup>6</sup> requiring both consultation with and reporting to Congress. Although there would be some opposition, we believe Congress would in large part support such involvement by the U.S. However, resistance would increase parallel to the degree of U.S. involvement, remembering again that significant U.S. capability to introduce forces is at least two weeks away, and that the UK has most likely prepared its plans assuming a largely unilateral, self-sufficient engagement.

For the present, however, our considerations are more narrow. We need to focus on the following:

- the degree and visibility of support we extend to the UK
- the mechanism by which any such support is managed
- decisions/plans regarding any prospective dispatch and use of US forces

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<sup>6</sup> The War Powers Resolution of 1973 (50 U.S.C. 1541–1548) revised the parameters under which a President could commit the United States to a military conflict.

- further assessment of likely Soviet behavior
- improving US preparations for managing the crisis

*RECOMMENDATION:*

Given all that is at stake, the need is manifest for coordinated preparations on our part so that we can respond quickly to any UK request or contingency. You should call Cap and suggest that State and Defense establish an ad hoc group to oversee U.S. military assistance to the UK and U.S. contingency planning for the crisis.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Haig did not approve or disapprove the recommendation; however, the notation on the first page of the memorandum indicates that he called Weinberger (see footnote 1 above). No record of Haig's telephone conversation with Weinberger has been found. Informal meetings on the South Atlantic situation between representatives of the Departments of State and Defense took place following Haig's conversation with Weinberger. See Document 184.